

Project Update: May 2011

Quite a number of activities have taken place since the last update which was in April. Our Water Resource Users Association, the Ondiri, Nyongara and Rungiri Water Resource Association (ONRU-WRUA) has had its name changed to the Ondiri, Nyongara, Kabuthi and Rungiri Water Resource Users Association (ONKARU-WRUA). This was necessitated by the people downstream in the Kabuthi River which is fed by the Ondiri swamp. The people who draw water from the river felt that they were left out in the name ONRU-WRUA and they sought to have their river added to the WRUA's name. I was elected the Chairman of Monitoring and Evaluation Committee of the WRUA, charged with monitoring and evaluation of all activities within Ondiri Swamp and the rivers Nyongara, Kabuthi and the Rungiri Dam. On May 31st, the Tana and Athi Rivers Development Authority (TARDA) announced that it would give ONKARU-WRUA a grant of KShs 2.5 million (£ 17,240) towards the conservation of Ondiri Swamp and the Nyongara and Kabuthi river basins as well as the Rungiri Dam. Consequently, the WRUA recruited youths aged between 18 and 35 years to carry out a massive tree planting exercise in which 20,000 tree and bamboo seedlings will be planted. A total of 189 youths comprising of 100 young men and 89 young women were recruited using a balloting process in a bid to ensure transparency. The recruitment was supervised by me, Francis Wainaina, the Organising Secretary, and Carol Wanyama of TARDA. Among the tasks to be carried out is the digging of terraces to arrest the siltation that has contributed to the degradation of the swamp. The tree and bamboo seedlings are being sourced from the members of the WRUA.

After several false starts, the visit to the Kimana Ecotourism site was realized last weekend. A total of 15 members of the WRUA were in the visit and they witnessed first-hand an example of a wetland and wildlife sanctuary that is well managed. The Kimana Community Wildlife Sanctuary is one of such projects. It became for Kenya in 1996, the country's first park beyond parks'. There were a number of parallels that were drawn between Kimana wetlands and Ondiri. Over-cultivation and excessive water extraction are the main problems of Kimana wetlands. Downstream flow from the Kilimanjaro has been reduced and certain sections of the wetlands only receive water during the rainy season and probably two months as opposed to the traditional five months of the year. Because farming is now happening all around the wetlands, some of the areas have been fenced off. Wildlife from Amboseli National Park is forced to pass through some narrow gaps increasing human-wildlife conflicts.

The situation has been further compounded by sub-division of the areas around the wetlands. The sub-division has been driven by the desire of members for greater equity. The overriding problem now is the unplanned *ad hoc* nature of resources exploitation. Some of the specific effects of land use pressure include

- Extensive water diversion upstream combined with wetlands conversion
- Significant wastage of water due to inefficient management and distribution of water
- Water contamination due to use of agricultural pesticides
- Conversion of rangelands which was being by livestock during dry season to cultivation

In recognition of the success of Kimana, Care for the Wild International is supporting a pioneering new project called Porini. This has funded a project manager to work with Maasai communities to help them establish conservation areas on communally owned land in the hope that small scale sustainable tourism will generate income for the community. It was a learning experience that will help ONKARU-WRUA in realizing the objective of developing Ondiri into an ecotourism facility.

